

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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For Immediate Release

**PRECIOUS CARGO PROGRAM UNDERWAY**

***CHP Adds 14,000 Officers To Patrol Cars Statewide; Chipper A Welcome Third Party At Collision Scenes***

Every year in California, thousands of young children are seriously injured in automobile collisions, several hundreds die. It is a scene repeated countless times across the state, and one which brings grief not only to families, but entire communities. It is also a situation which never fails to test the emotional strength of California Highway Patrol (CHP) Officers. Often the first to arrive, officers must care for the seriously injured. And while tending to the victims in these tragedies, they also seek to lessen fear and suffering and to bridge the gap between efficient officer and compassionate fellow human.

According to California Highway Patrol Commissioner Dwight O. Helmick this quandary has lead to the creation of "Precious Cargo," a program designed to provide comfort to the young victims at crash scenes. "'Chipper' is a stuffed chipmunk plush toy dressed in an authentic replica of a CHP Officer's uniform. We believe that 'Chipper' can help a child cope with the stress he or she feels during the very difficult circumstances which occur after a collision," Helmick said.

In a joint effort of the California Highway Patrol, the California Association of Highway Patrolmen and California Casualty Group, the CHP is placing "Chipper" on the duty roster throughout the state as a means of reaching out under the most trying of circumstances. The newest officer "on the beat" measures all of 14 inches – from the tips of "Chipper's" fuzzy brown toes to the top of its hat.

With a donation in excess of \$100,000 from California Casualty Group's Advisory Board Contributions Committee, "Chippers" are taking to the highways of California, with the goal of putting a pair in each patrol car. The firm's donation has enabled the CHP to create a "Chipper" force some 14,000 strong.

According to Thomas R. Brown, Chairman of the California Casualty Group, the firm's Advisory Board Contributions Committee sees the program as a positive link between community and law enforcement.

"The CHP has many responsibilities to the state's citizens" noted Brown. "This program enables an officer to show compassion while dealing with youngsters under extremely stressful circumstances. As a California-based company, we are very committed to the success of this program. We insure thousands of drivers in California, and certainly know first-hand the statistics behind fatal and serious-injury collisions," said Brown.

According to CHP records, in 1995 there were 216 children ages nine and younger killed in the state; another 18,753 in the same age group were injured. And behind each number in the statistics is a face - a trauma not soon forgotten.

CHP Officer Jim Harris heard about the new program and enthusiasm was unmistakable. "I wish I had had a 'Chipper' at a crash I recently handled in Galt," Harris commented. Officer Harris responded to a collision on SR 99 in which the driver of a delivery van had fallen asleep. The van crossed the centerline and crashed head-on into a Ford Ranger pickup, instantly killing the pickup's female driver. The woman's 4-year-old daughter, safely secured in a child safety seat, was uninjured.

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“When I pulled up, the little girl was crying at the top of her lungs,” Harris recounted. “My mommy, my mommy,” she was yelling; her mother’s body hanging upside down in the seat belt. If we had had a ‘Chipper’ –something soft and comfy to clutch – to give to this little girl when we got her out, it might have helped us calm her. **It s hard enough to deal with fatalities, but it s even more difficult to comfort a child who has just lost a parent or sibling, or who themselves have been injured.**

Harris acknowledged that a collision does not have to be severe for “Chipper” to soothe an upset child. “Any collision is extremely stressful for a child,” he said. “Collisions are also extremely stressful for us,” he concluded.

“We are very pleased to have initiated this program for the CHP,” said California Casualty Group’s Brown. “We hope there will be a long line of corporate sponsors after us to continue the ‘Chipper’ program indefinitely.”

Interested corporate sponsors may contact the California Association of Highway Patrolmen, (916) 452-6751.

# CHIPPER

## FACT SHEET

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### *Meet Officer Chipper*

- “Chipper” is a non-gender specific plush toy, measuring 14” from hat to toe.
- “Chipper” is clothed in a detail-rich, authentic replica of a CHP uniform.
- With fuzzy feet, paws and face, arms stretched wide, “Chipper” is friendly, unassuming and non-threatening.

### *About the Program Precious Cargo*

- *The California Association of Highway Patrolmen* (CAHP) is instituting “*Precious Cargo*,” a program which puts “*Chipper*” into highway patrol cars around the state.
- “Precious Cargo” is an expansion of a role performed by “CHP,” a life-size mascot for the Department who brings safety messages to children.
- “Precious Cargo” is also designed to provide officers of the California Highway Patrol a way to reach out to the youngest victims on California’s highways.

### *Precious Cargo Program Specifics*

- “Chippers” will be on active duty throughout the State of California by mid-February 1997.
- “Chippers” are given on-site at the discretion of officers during the course of duty, generally to children between 3-8 years old, who have been traumatized due to injury or presence at an accident scene.

### *Corporate Sponsor*

- “Precious Cargo” is possible through a generous donation from San Mateo based **California Casualty Group**, an insurer in its 83<sup>rd</sup>. year serving Californians, specializing in affinity groups such as the CAHP.
- The members of the CAHP are actively seeking additional corporate sponsors to extend the program indefinitely, while expanding “Chipper’s” role in the area of safety communications.

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